



Town of Groton, Connecticut

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Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

Mayor Heather Bond Somers, Councilors Dean G. Antipas, Bruce S. Flax, Bill Johnson, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Deborah L. Peruzzotti, Rita M. Schmidt, James L. Streeter, and Harry A. Watson

Tuesday, May 22, 2012

7:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

REGULAR MEETING

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Somers called the meeting to order at 7:12 p.m.

2. **ROLL CALL**

Members Present: Mayor Somers, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Peruzzotti and Councilor Watson
Members Absent: Councilor Schmidt and Councilor Streeter

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnyan.

3. **Calendar and Communications**

None.

4. **Approval of Minutes**

2012-0144 Approval of Minutes (Committee of the Whole)

RESOLUTION ACCEPTING COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the Town Council Committee of the Whole meetings of May 1, 2012, May 8, 2012 and May 15, 2012 are hereby accepted and approved.

A motion was made by Councilor Peruzzotti, seconded by Councilor Watson, to adopt.

The motion carried unanimously

Councilor Streeter joined the meeting.

Members Present: Mayor Somers, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Streeter and Councilor Watson
Members Absent: Councilor Schmidt

5. **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

None.

6. **NEW BUSINESS**

2012-0145 Permanent School Building Committee - Activity Update

Discussed

Mayor Somers noted that members of the Committee were not able to be present, but they will try to come to the meeting on June 5th. The Town Manager suggested that perhaps they could come to the May 29th joint meeting with the Board of Education. The Board of Education has changed the time of that meeting to 5:30 p.m. at the Fitch High School Library.

2012-0146 Ordinance Changing and Redefining the Voting Districts

Discussed

Town Clerk Betsy Moukawsher and Registrar of Voters Steve Massett were present to address the Council. Ms. Moukawsher explained that as a result of the census, congressional and state house districts have changed requiring the Town to change its voting districts. A public hearing must be

held on the proposed ordinance. Mr. Massett presented maps showing changes to the assembly districts and Town voting districts 1, 4 and 5. He reviewed the change in the number of voters in each district and suggested that after the next general election, the Council may want to consider combining districts 4 and 5. Discussion followed on the specifics of the voting districts, number of voters in each district, and combining the districts. The RTM will be reapportioned after the next election. Councilor Johnson feels that Indianfield Road should be in the same district as the Library. The Town Clerk explained that the voting districts are defined by the number of registered voters, not the demographics. Mr. Massett noted that the number of voting districts and divisions are up to the Town Council.

Councilor Peruzzotti expressed support for combining districts 4 and 5 now, which would eliminate one polling place.

A motion was made by Mayor Somers, seconded by Councilor Streeter, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution and that voting districts 4 and 5 be combined.

Councilor Antipas questioned the origin of the eight districts and stated he would like to consider that before the districts are combined. Councilor Flax asked how the change would affect districts 4 and 5. The Town Clerk noted that district numbering would change, and RTM representation would be for the combined. Additionally, the polling place may be impacted.

The motion carried unanimously

2011-0238

Road Reconstruction Bond Ordinance

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger noted that Council has discussed this issue as well as police station renovations. The Council must decide if it wants to schedule these two items for bond referendums in November. A draft scheduled was developed by the Town Clerk. Two other potential bond referendum items are Judson Avenue, which the Council felt should be postponed, and the Flanders Road Utilities project. For the road reconstruction bond, staff would have to identify the roads that could be done in a three- to five-year time period and confer with the bond attorney on the wording of the ordinance.

Mayor Somers would like information on the impact on the mill rate if roads and the police station renovations are bonded. The Town Manager stated that the Town's bond burden is relatively low and would not be impacted by these projects, but specific numbers can be provided. The referenda should be included with the regular election if the Council decides to move forward.

The road bond would be approximately \$8 to \$12 million. The Town Manager suggested that if the projects are brought to the voters, the Town Council must be supportive or there is no need to bring them to referendum. He reviewed the advantages to bonding road reconstruction. It would be a comprehensive approach for the Town, City and Groton Long Point. The Town Manager suggested that the advantages to such a plan exceed the costs associated with bonding. The Town is considering a 10 year bond.

Councilor Johnson referenced an e-mail that he sent to Councilors. He opposes bonding the roads and noted that Public Works can only do \$1 million worth of road projects a year. Councilor Johnson would rather see an ordinance that forces the Town Council to expend \$1 million a year.

The Town Manager stated he is not aware of any ordinance that can bind future councils on fiscal matters. He noted that the Council approved \$1,000,000 for road projects in FYE 2013, but it included the City and Groton Long Point. According to the Pavement Management Plan, the Council would need to spend \$2,000,000 per year for all three entities just to keep from falling behind.

In response to Councilor O'Beirne, it was noted that there are no expenses associated with

multi-year borrowing, only initial costs.

Councilor Peruzzotti supports the bond because it spreads the payment over time instead of placing the burden on the current taxpayers. She feels that the FYE 2013 appropriations were made with the understanding that the Town would move forward on a bond referendum and this was the RTM's understanding as well. Councilor Watson concurred.

Councilor Flax asked the cost of the bond. Mr. Schneider reviewed the principal and interest payments for various years on a \$10 million bond. Councilor Flax does not want to pay extra money and feels the budget process is satisfactory.

Mayor Somers suggested that money was appropriated for FYE 2013 because it hasn't been done for three years and the roads are deteriorating. That is not a satisfactory process.

With respect to the police station renovations, Mayor Somers feels that a November referendum is premature because more information and public education is required. Councilor Streeter noted there are serious safety issues that perhaps should be presented to the Council separately if it does not go to referendum. The firing range could be submitted to SCCOG as a regional issue.

Town Manager Oefinger explained that a regional firing range is under construction at the submarine base and is scheduled to open at the end of June. Although Captain Denno desires the facility to be open to local police departments, it may not become a regional facility due to travel times and prioritization of its use by Navy personnel. The Town cannot solely rely on that facility. The Town has let other towns use Groton's facility on occasion, but there is a cost to operate such a facility (including lead removal) and neighboring towns do not like to pay their fair share for regional facilities.

Councilor Antipas suggested that the Council adopt a plan and fund it every year.

Mayor Somers asked for a show of hands in support of the bond for road reconstruction.

The Town Manager noted that the Town can develop a plan and has many plans such as the Computer Replacement Fund and Fleet, but the question is will the Town stick to the plan. Discipline is tough.

Mayor Somers stated it is not a good idea to send the road project forward based on the show of hands. She feels it is important to have a plan going forward, but if the Town crafts a plan, the Council must support it. The Town Manager noted there is a big difference between planning one year at a time versus five years at a time; getting the Town Council to commit to a number that changes every year is problematic.

Councilor Peruzzotti questioned who will stick to the plan if the current councilors are not re-elected. Councilor Streeter used an analogy of a house where the repairs are put off until it gets to a critical point.

Mayor Somers polled the Council on moving the police renovations project forward. Five councilors expressed support for waiting (Councilors Streeter, Antipas, Somers, Watson, and Peruzzotti) and three Councilors expressed support for a November referendum (Councilors Johnson, Flax, and O'Beirne).

The Town Manager noted that the Council has made appropriations over the years for a needs assessment, design, and updated cost estimates for the police station renovations project.

Councilor Peruzzotti feels that votes should be taken and the majority vote should be supported by

the losing side. The Council owes it to citizens to give them a choice. Although Councilors will not agree on every referendum, all Councilors should make sure that the public is educated on the issues and try to get the referendums passed.

A motion was made by Councilor Peruzzotti, seconded by Councilor Flax, to send the road maintenance and rehabilitation ordinance to the voters in November 2012.

The motion carried by the following vote:

In Favor: 5 - Councilor O'Beirne, Councilor Peruzzotti, Mayor Somers, Councilor Streeter, Councilor Watson

Opposed: 3 - Councilor Antipas, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Flax, to send the police station renovations ordinance to referendum in November 2012. Councilor Peruzzotti asked if a spring referendum would be agreeable to allow more time to gather information. Councilor Watson noted that the Council can proceed now and stop at any time in the future.

The motion carried by the following vote:

In Favor: 6 - Councilor Antipas, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor O'Beirne, Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Watson

Opposed: 2 - Mayor Somers, Councilor Streeter

The Town Manager asked the Council what dollar amount they would like to bond for the roads. Staff will fit a program into the dollar amount. Discussion followed and the Mayor asked staff to come up with a number.

Town Manager Oefinger asked for authorization to have the bond attorney prepare the ordinances and authorization packets and to set public hearings.

A motion was made by Councilor Peruzzotti, seconded by Councilor Flax, to authorize staff to have the bond attorney prepare the ordinances and authorization packets and to set public hearings.

Councilor Johnson asked if there was any support for the Flanders Road project. The Town Manager explained that the project is not a road maintenance project, but a utility extension project. Other Councilors did not support taking the separate project to referendum.

Councilor Watson suggested that if a majority of the Town Council votes in favor of something, others should not work against it. From a leadership perspective, it does not do the Town any good for Councilors to actively work against something if they are in the minority. Councilor Johnson fundamentally disagreed and Councilor O'Beirne disagreed in part. Councilor Antipas stated his view that if the Council has resolved something as a body, the debate is over.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 6 - Mayor Somers, Councilor Flax, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Streeter and Councilor Watson

Opposed: 1 - Councilor Johnson

Abstain: 1 - Councilor Antipas

2012-0069 Police Station Renovations

Discussed

See discussion and motion in 5/22/12 Committee of the Whole minutes under 2011-0238 Road Reconstruction Bond Ordinance.

2012-0141 Port Security Grant

Discussed

marine patrol boats. The Town's portion of that grant would be \$6,250.

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2012-0156 Establishment of Trails Coordinating Committee

Discussed

The Council reviewed a memorandum from Doug Ackerman, Interim Director of Parks and Recreation, suggesting the establishment of a Trails Coordinating Committee to bring together the various groups working on similar projects. This would be an advisory ad hoc or subcommittee.

Mayor Somers expressed support for establishing the committee as a subcommittee of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan Implementation Advisory Committee. She asked for clarification about voting members and the Town Manager stated that all members would be voting members including Town staff.

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Streeter, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2012-0157 OpSail 2012 - Update

Discussed

Mayor Somers was contacted by Rob Simmons who is involved in OpSail 2012. He has asked if the Town would help fund transportation of sailors to Shennecossett Yacht Club on Sunday, July 8th for a cookout from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. Most of the sailors will be Navy personnel. Staff is trying to price school bus transportation which is estimated to be \$5,000 to \$7,000 for the event. Rob Simmons has indicated he is willing to address the Town Council. The Town Manager noted that he is not aware of any state dollars available for transportation, but there is a 50% state match for local dollars raised for OpSail 2012.

Town Manager noted that there are encumbered funds that will expire on June 30th that could be used if a contract is in place by June 30th.

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Johnson, to authorize up to \$7,000 for transportation for the OpSail 2012 event. The source of funding will be identified by the Town Manager.

The Town Manager explained that the contract is anticipated to involve 11 buses for the initial transport, with the first bus going back to do a sweep for those missed the first time.

The motion carried unanimously

2012-0040 Town Council Goal Setting

Discussed

Mayor Somers distributed draft goals to the Council for review. She asked that Councilors forward their comments to her by May 29th.

2012-0130 Noank Fire District Presentation on Noank School Reuse

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, to enter executive session at 8:55 p.m. to discuss the potential lease of the former Noank School property to the Noank Fire District, and to invite the Town Manager to attend.

The motion carried unanimously

Recommended for a Resolution

Mayor Somers explained that during the executive session, the Council discussed the Noank Fire District's proposal to reuse Noank School. The Council decided to offer Noank an additional six months to develop a full and detailed multi-year plan for the school, with critical and established

numbers. The plan that was submitted by the Fire District was not acceptable to the Council. During the six month time period, the property will remain under the Town's control, the Town will maintain the building, and no access to or use of the school by the Noank Fire District will be allowed.

2011-0218 Fitch High School Baseball Field - Update

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger noted that revisions have been made to the agreement addendum and they have been forwarded to the team's attorney. There was some initial feedback, but there has been no formal response from the baseball team.

2012-0048 Purchase of Spicer Properties, Thomas Road

Discussed

During the FYE 2013 budget deliberations, the RTM allocated \$75,000 to the open space fund which will be used for the purchase of the Spicer property. The Town Manager had requested \$100,000, but the RTM cut \$25,000, which is the normal allocation to the fund. A Purchase Sales Agreement has been signed by all parties. The total purchase price is \$960,000 with \$650,000 coming from a state grant and \$310,000 coming from the open space fund.

The Town Manager requested authorization for preparation of the deed and acceptance of the property.

Councilor O'Beirne asked what stipulations would be placed on the land as a result of the state grant. The Town Manager stated those restrictions can be provided to the Council. Councilor O'Beirne stated he is specifically interested in use of the lake.

A motion was made by Mayor Somers, seconded by Councilor Streeter, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

7. Consideration of Committee Referral Items as per Town Council Referral List

Councilor Peruzzotti asked about the high school window issue. The Town Manager stated that the contractor is expected to be doing work this summer. The Director of Public Works will be asked to make a presentation at the next meeting.

With respect to Groton Long Point's request for a supplemental appropriation, the Town Manager stated that he has not received any additional information from FEMA or Bob Congdon.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

Mayor Somers reminded the Council that there will be a special meeting on June 16th to discuss the budget process.

Councilors were asked to provide their summer vacation schedules to staff.

9. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Johnson, seconded by Councilor Flax, to adjourn the meeting at 9:37 p.m..

The motion carried unanimously.